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OPENING STATEMENT

CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE

**-OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON RECENT IMMIGRANTS AND
BLACK AND HISPANIC CITIZENS**

RAYBURN 2226

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Good Morning Mr. Chairman. I would like to say at the outset that I am just as concerned as you are about any past, current or future potential impact that the current trends of American Immigration policy may have on low wage workers, and African-American and Hispanic citizens. I also come to this hearing with some pause and some concern.

I believe that it is a troubling situation that any member of a minority group would not be hired because an illegal immigrant was actually preferred for the job. However, there does not seem to be too much documented evidence out there to suggest that this is going on.

I am also concerned Mr. Chairman that this Congress not serve as a vehicle for fostering discrimination or for drawing a wedge between African-Americans and Hispanic Americans.

I am also concerned Mr. Chairman that while the purpose of this hearing is supposed to gain a better understanding of the impact that immigrants without a high school education have on the employment and wage-earning prospects of recent immigrants and Black and Hispanic citizens, most of the witness testimony that will be offered to us today concludes that immigration has had a negative impact on low skilled workers, and that their lack of education is the main reason of the low wage.

However, I do think that the focus of this hearing ignores the benefits of immigration. In several studies, some of which we will talk about today, find that immigrants create new jobs and spur economic growth from their businesses and investments and spend billions of dollars on American products and industries. I would merely like to point out that targeting the immigrant community merely evades any credible solution to a long-term problem: providing economic and educational opportunities for a community whose plight has been largely ignored by this Republican majority.

While some have claimed and will at this hearing that African-Americans have suffered disproportionately from immigration, there are highly reputable studies that have been done to disprove this. The leading example of the study done by James Smith and Barry Edmonston. The title is: The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration.

This was a study done by a group of labor economists and one of the main conclusions that was reached was "While some have suspected that blacks suffer

disproportionately from the inflow of low-skilled immigrants, none of the available evidence suggests that blacks have been particularly hard-hit on a national level.

Some have lost their jobs, especially in places where immigrants are concentrated. But the majority of African-Americans live elsewhere, and their economic fortunes are tied largely to other factors. The study also concluded that the evidence points to the conclusion that immigration has had a relatively small adverse impact on the wage and employment opportunities of competing native groups.

This effect does not appear to be concentrated in the local areas where immigrants live, but instead is dispersed across the United States. This dispersal comes about in part because competing native workers migrate out of the areas to which immigrants move.

Finally, the overall impact of immigration is miniscule given the enormous size of the American economy. Also, the latest Labor Statistics released last month indicate that minority unemployment has fallen. Unemployment rates among Blacks and Hispanics fell last month to the lowest levels since the Federal government began tracking them in the early 1970s.

In its annual report released this week, the White House's Council of Economic Advisers said that both wage gains and greater employment in recent years have particularly benefited minority groups.

After examining these results from the Labor Department, I still fail to see where the African American community has been devastated by immigration. I am

very gratified that Chairman Smith and the Republican party is concerned about how minority communities are affected.

However, I fear that the concern in this instance is slightly misplaced. Issues that effect minority communities are affirmative action, civil rights, fair housing, raising the minimum wage, improving public education, and affordable childcare.

Immigration is not a problem for African-Americans. Hispanic and African-Americans have worked together for years on those issues. This hearing has the potential to divide, not bring us together.

I would like to introduce into the record the National Research Council Study that I referenced above into the hearing record. This study is a nationally recognized study that is often used when examining this topic.

I believe that it is a reasonable conclusion that the overall impact of immigration is miniscule given the enormous size of the American economy. And second, the primary economic effect of immigration is to redistribute income from the poor and unskilled to skilled workers and owners of capital.

While it may be true that immigrants are competing with Blacks for some low-skilled jobs, I think that most labor economists conclude that this is not a national problem, and an attempt to turn it into one is misplaced at best.

Let's work together to find a meaningful solution by creating these educational and economic opportunities, rather than dreaming up new proposals like a high school education for new immigrants prior to their arrival in the United States. These solutions should be reached in a bipartisan fashion.

Thank-you Mr. Chairman.